

Last Days of Persecution

141

it has pleased their Majesties in their great pity and compassion to send this letter to your Excellency.

" Their instructions are that if any Christian has been apprehended, while observing the religion of his sect, you are to deliver him from all molestation and annoyance and not to inflict any penalty upon him, for a very long experience has convinced the Emperors that there is no method of turning these people from their madness.

" Your Excellency will therefore write to the magistrates, to the commander of the forces, and to the town provosts, in each city, that they may know for the future that they are not to interfere with the Christians any more."

In other words, the prisons were to be emptied and the mad sectaries to be let alone. The bigot was obliged to bow, however reluctantly, to the wishes and commands of the senior Augustus, even though Galerius was a broken and dying man.

Nevertheless, within six months we find Maximin devising new schemes for troubling the Christians. Eusebius tells us with what joy the edict of toleration had been welcomed, with what triumph the Christians had quitted their prisons, and with what enthusiastic exultation the bands of Christian confessors, returning from the mines to their own towns and villages, were received by the Christian communities in the places through which they passed. Those whose testimony to their faith had not been so sure and clear, those who had bowed the knee to Baal under the shadow of torture and death, humbly approached their stouter-hearted brethren and implored their intercession. The Church rose from the